

Master Plan Implementation Committee

Minutes of January 27, 2011

Meeting called to order by Ed Forsberg, Chairman, at 6:10 pm in Room 112, Town Hall (moved from Room 116, Town Hall, due to a conflict with another meeting being held in that room).

Committee Members Present: Ed Forsberg, Al Goetz, Michael Gallahue, Roger Turner, Dominick Ianno, Bruce Norwell, Dick Power, Dick Nottebart, John Desmond.

Visitors Present: Eric Kraus, Vice Chairman of the Board of Selectmen; Michael Boynton, Town Administrator.

Staff Present: Don Johnson, Stephanie Mercandetti, Josh Cole

Ed announced that the purpose of the meeting was to discuss the Town's ability to purchase the Walpole Woodworkers property on East Street.

Eric Kraus and Michael Boynton described the process that the Board of Selectmen has undertaken with Walpole Woodworkers relative to the land purchase and the characteristics of the land itself. The Board of Selectmen had placed an article on the 2011 Spring Town Meeting warrant for a debt exclusion override to fund the purchase and will place the question on the ballot for the 2011 Town of Walpole General Election to be held in June 2011. The potential use of the land would be for Town uses, including town facilities such as a Senior Center and Public Safety Facility. Over the past 4 ½ - 5 months the Board has held several executive sessions with the landowner. Originally the landowner was asking for \$5 million. They came back – they want a retail presence – they want to keep a frontage piece, which, with that piece of land, is being offered at \$4.5 million. Thirteen acres in total are involved, of which 11 acres are developable. A conservation easement and neighborhood buffer could be available. There are several existing buildings on site, some of which could be torn down and some of which the Town could move and reuse, as the Town would own them. The Town would need a clean 21E report for financing. The land appears to be clean enough for the anticipated Town uses – much of it is wood waste. The town's Purchase and Sales Agreement with Walpole Woodworkers requires a clean bill of health, and the Town would want it with policy insurance.

Group discussion proceeded to likely uses of the land, if purchased, and the process for the evaluation of its best uses if purchased. Dense housing development on the parcel such as a 40B project may not be in the Town's best interests; it could be cheaper for the Town to buy it than if it became such a housing development. The Walpole Woodworkers site is prime downtown real estate; such housing would change downtown forever. The Town could use the land to protect downtown character, giving us options for its use. The vote would not be a vote for Senior Center and Police/Fire building; rather it would be a vote to purchase land for multi-use purposes, which fits in with the Master Plan, and not tied to a particular building. In addition to the potential for public safety and senior center buildings, the uses could include fields, school uses, and housing as desired by the Town.

Two points, per a recent Walpole Times article, were brought up by Al Goetz: (1) we are not making any more land; and (2) Walpole Woodworkers has been there for 80 years, and this probably won't happen for another 100 years in the downtown area.

Group discussion proceeded to charge the MPIC to be a "think tank" to meet with all Town agencies, including but not limited to the Police Chief, Fire Chief, Council on Aging, Recreation, and Schools in the formulation of a study, a general comprehensive plan, for the use of the land, with options to show to Town Meeting. This can be in the form of a position statement through the MPIC backed up by research and a study, not a final design for the use of the site. The use of the site shouldn't be tied to a public safety building or any particular building or use at this time, but a general plan for the use of the land with options is critical to pass an override, if we can show that we have included such a feasibility study to give it credibility. Comprehensiveness with options gives it credibility. Other similar studies were for one building. At this juncture a study for every parcel available and for every facility need can't be done – that becomes expensive, and a Town-wide comprehensive facility needs study performed by a consultant, to tell us how the Town can most effectively and efficiently satisfy its 50 year facility needs, is necessary to do all of this work properly in the long term. Funding for a detailed town facilities study of all town facility needs for the next 50 years, tentatively in the amount of \$200,000 if it includes both schools and town, may be added to the Town Meeting article for this detailed study

Michael Gallahue made a motion to support the Board of Selectmen in its efforts to purchase the Walpole Woodworkers parcel for municipal facilities uses for \$4.5 million and an additional amount set by the Town Administrator to develop a municipal facilities plan. Dick Nottebart seconded the motion and added an amendment to the motion stating that the MPIC would support this concept in principle. Michael Gallahue agreed to the amendment to his motion. The vote on the motion as amended was 9-0-0.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:53 pm.

Respectfully submitted,